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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to increase awareness of some of the ways that we, as individuals and as a society, are encouraging the crime of rape. The paper examines our ideals about sexuality, appropriate sexual roles for women and men, the relationship between sex and aggression and how these contribute to rape. Laws, court procedures and police procedures concerning rape victims are discussed as are ways that rape victims are pictured in various media. Finally the paper looks at the way we use rape or the fear of rape, as a threat to keep women in what has been traditionally considered appropriate roles. (Author)

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Are We Encouraging Rape?

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Are we encouraging rape? You bet we are. We are encouraging rape by our perpetuation of stereotypic sexual roles, by our views of rape victims and by our views of the relationship between sex and violence. Our views have encouraged rape by helping to form a judical system that brutalizes the rape victims while releasing the rapist. Our views have also helped to form a moral system that admires the rapist while degrading the rape victim.

Our ideas about sexuality and about what are appropriate sexual roles for women and men , are in part responsible for this situation. We define sexual roles for women and men very differently. Women are taught to be passive in thought, word and sexual deed, while men are taught to be aggressive in any and all sexual situations. Both women and men are told that to step out of these narrow roles is both unhealthy and unnatural.

Women are told that aggressive behavior on their part indicates that they are not being fulfilled as women and that what an aggressive woman really wants is to be raped. Men are told that aggression, both sexual and non-sexual, is the gauge upon which their masculinity will be measured. They are told that not being aggressive, or even worse, being passive is a threat to their manhood (Komisar, 1970).

This treat to manhood is particularly evident in dating situations. A man who does not measure up to expected sexual aggressions is considered less of a man by his peers and often even by his date. The man must "throw passes" and "score" with women or he loses respect. The symbolism of "throwing passes" and "scoring" is not accidental, for we teach sex as a sport and it is a sport that has winners and losers.

Just as the man is pressured to score, the woman is pressured not to allow this to happen. Even in her passive role the onus of sexual control is on her. The onus is on her, in part, because as the passive partner she is not supposed to be as involved and not to get as carried away as the man and this is supposed to be able to keep the situation under control.

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More practically the woman is the one who gets pregnant and doesn't get forgiven for sexual transgressions. Thus she either stays in control or faces any and all consequences.

So, in sexual roles, we have trained men to prove their manhood and women to protect their womanhood. Men feel obligated to try to have sex whether they want to or not, while women feel obligated to resist sexual advances whether they want to or not. Neither feels free to talk to the other about either what they want or what they fear. Honest sexual communication has little place in the sex role training that we give women and men. Men are told that women say no when they mean yes, women are told about the strong urgent lusts of men and both are told not to talk about it to each other.

All these things the roles, the expectations and the lack of communication set the stage for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of behaviors. And misinterpretations of behavior are a primary cause of rapes and attempted rapes committed by dates and friends.

If a man believes that an invitation to a woman's apartment for a drink means an invitation to have sex and a woman believes she is just inviting for a drink and they don't verbalize their expectations, then there will be misunderstanding, anger and possibly rape. When a woman views a dinner date as dinner and a man views it as payment for later sexual favors and neither talk about their views, then again there will be misunderstanding, anger and possibly rape.

These situations don't start out as rapes but often end up that way. The man feels angry that he was "lead on" or "teased" and uses forced sex, rape, to show the woman; to show her that she can't treat him that way, to show her who is boss and to show her that he can dominate her. In forcing sex on a date a man is often just playing out the aggressive sex role that he has been taught is appropriate for him. He is being the assertive he-man who doesn't take no for an answer even when that no is from a date who doesn't want to have sex with him.

In his record "Bawdy Songs and Backroom Ballards" Oscar Brand tells us that "Seduction is for sissies, a he-man wants his rape." Our national infatuation with James Bond tells us we respect men who are forceful and aggressive in all areas of their lives, particularly their sex lives. Playboy magazine tells us that with executive power comes sexual priviledge and that those who don't take no for an answer in regard to sex are bound

to be successful in everything else they attempt.

It is difficult to live in this culture and not become aware from messages like these, that sex and aggression are very closely related. Sex and aggression have become an integral part of the masculine mystique and few things combine sex and aggression as well as rape.

While rape has become part of the masculine mystique, rape or more specifically the fear of rape has also become a threat to keep women in "their place."

We threaten women who deviate from traditional roles with rape. A woman who hitchhikes, goes to a bar alone or even goes out walking after dark is viewed as "asking to be raped," as is just about any woman who is out on her own with out the protection of a man. Dependency and passivity are encouraged by a fear of rape and an even greater fear that "if you are raped it may be your own fault." That last quote, a slogan from a recent Georgia anti-crime campaign informed women that if they did not remain in their traditional roles, staying at home after dark, not going out alone etc, and they got raped it was their own fault. Rape was the punishment for not doing what was expected of them.

Israel also followed this line of reasoning when they wanted to put a curfew on women in order to curb sexual assaults on women. Then if the women went out and got attacked it was again their own fault. Fortunately in this case, unlike so many others, Prime Minister Golda Meir reminded the cabinet that "It is the men who are attacking the women. If there is to be a curfew, let the men stay home" (Georgia Commission on the Status of Women, 1974).

Thus, Golda Meir aside, we use the fear of rape very effectively to limit the movements and independence of women. Don't do this, don't go there, don't wear this, don't live alone - if you do you may be raped. Rape is a club we use to keep women in prescribed roles.

Rape is a part of the masculine mystique and rape is a club we use to beat women into submission. The feelings explicit in these views are also explicit in our views of the rape victim.

Our view of the rape victim swings between the belief of death before dishonor (recently updated to injured severely before dishonor) and the belief that women really want to be raped. The belief in death before dishonor is most evident in the court where it is next to impossible to get a conviction on a rape charge if the victim does not have visible scars.

A recent court case in Washington, D.C. also upheld this view when the jury decided the accused was innocent of two rape charge because the victims were not battered and brused.(in this case the accused had confessed but it had not been allowed as evidence).

But while we feel that a woman who is about to be raped will fight and be injured before submitting we also feel that women secretly want to be raped and if attacked by the right man will definately enjoy it. This belief is mirrored in our books, magazines, movies, jokes and even records.

Consider this article from a July 1974 issue of Playboy:

> A lovely yound maiden named Hood
> Met a randy young wolf in the wood.
> Though she said she would die
> Undefiled ere comply
> She gave in when she saw how things stood.

or this quote from Lord Byron's poem "Don Juan"

> A little still she strove and repented
> And whispering "I will ne'er consent" -consented"

or from Ovid in his Ars Amatoria

> Women often wish to to give unwillingly what they really like to give.

From Ovid to Playboy poets have been telling us the lie that women want to be raped. But poets aren't the only ones who give us this message.

Consider Mel Brooks popular movie Young Frankenstein where Frankenstein's frigid fiance discovers true happiness while being raped by the monster and lives with him (the monster) happily ever after.

Or the book the New Centurians where the police joke about a rapist and explain if they had been the rapist there would have been no charges filed, because the woman would been satisfied.

Or the joke where the female half of a nude couple in bed announces "If I'd known being a hostage was like this, I wouldn't have made such a fuss

as you dragged me out of the bank."

Or the piece of advice that is often given to rape victims of "relax and enjoy it."

Or . . . the list goes on and on. Anyone can add to it from their own experiences.

This list has one very frightening function. It helps to convince us that a woman will enjoy being raped. Once we are convinced or even partially convinced of this we have taken a tremendous step toward saying that rape is acceptable.

Evidence of how far we have gone can be gotten by taking a look at our own thoughts when an attractive female client says that she was raped by her date in her apartment last night or when an older unattractive client says that the building superintendent tried to attack her.

The ramifications of our acceptance of rape go far beyond personal feeling, for if women want and enjoy rape under certain circumstances, then a woman's charging a man for rape is felt to be caused by jealousy, fear of parents or boyfriend or a desire to do the accused harm. This belief is found in our court system where the judge in a rape case must instruct the jury that rape is easy to charge and hard to defend and where, in most states, the sex life of the victim but not the accused is open to public investigation. It is found in our rape laws where most states require corroberation beyond the victim's testimony and it is found in our police stations where police refuse to take reports on rapes more than twenty-four hours old.

The result of our attitudes, that rape is part of the masculine mystique, that its the fault of the woman if she gets raped and that women really want to be raped, is that very few rapes are reported, fewer go to trial and there are almost no convictions.

What can we do? Well we can take self-defense courses, increase lighting and even castrate rapists but that won't make much difference. What will make a difference is us - we can stop rape:

By changing our attitudes and those of others.

By trying increase honest communication about sex between women and men.

By being aware that a person who has forcible intercourse with a date, has committed rape.

By knowing that no healthy normal person, female or male wants to be raped.

By realizing that one person's fantasizing about being carried away by a prince on a whi. charger does not make it O.K. to grab her, throw her down and attack her.

And finally by realizing that women are people and as people we have the right to live our lives the best way we can without being subject to sexual assault.

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